

# BEST PRACTICES FOR SERVICE-LEARNING SYLLABI

## FRAME THE EXPERIENCE

- The syllabus needs to **indicate service-learning early on and often**. Make service-learning an integral part of the syllabus, weaving discussions of service work, course learning objectives, reflection assignments and community partnerships throughout the document.
- “SL” or “Service-Learning” should appear in the **course title**, even if parenthetical.
- Mention that this is a service-learning course in the **course description**, or very early on in the document.
- Include a **definition of service-learning**. This can be edited to reflect the specific service the students will be providing.

## EXAMPLE DEFINITION:

**Service-learning is a structured learning experience that provides students with the opportunity to meet academic objectives through provision of community service. Students will work with a community partner to provide a service or implement a project to meet the needs of the organization, develop their own skills and learning, and reflect on the value of the experience from a community and interpersonal perspective.**

- Outline the **course objectives** students will address through their service work in the community. This requires that community needs are identified and then linked to appropriate course objectives. The syllabus should explicitly tell students how the assigned service work meets course learning objectives and fulfills a need in the community.

The following examples are taken from BUS 269 Principles of Marketing.

## EXAMPLE SERVICE-LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will learn the concept of the 4P's of marketing through promotional efforts of the blood drive.
2. Students will enhance communication and sales skills through blood drive presentations and other blood donor recruitment efforts.

3. Students will analyze and problem solve through team efforts to create marketing materials.
  4. Students will understand the value of giving back to the community.
- Consider whether a set number of service hours or requiring the completion of a certain project for the community partner will best meet your course objectives and the needs of the community partner. If you choose to require a set number of hours, the number of hours required should reflect what is needed to ensure a quality learning experience for students and achieve an appropriate outcome for the community partner. State the **number of service hours required** of each student and delineate direct service hours, or contact hours with the community partner, versus time spent working on reflection and other service-learning assignments.
  - **Carefully consider adjusting the workload of students.** It is crucial that service work and related assignments are not an add-on to existing course work, but rather, in place of existing course work. Identify assignments that can be replaced or re-focused. Consider fewer readings, or at least make the readings more closely related to community issues and civic engagement. Replace papers with service-learning reflection journals and writing assignments. If there is a major research assignment in your course, consider integrating the community experience and oral interviews as a major primary source.

## SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

- Provide an outline of the service project or experience and the expectations for the students. The following example is taken from BUS 269 Principles of Marketing.

### EXAMPLE: AMERICAN RED CROSS SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

Service-learning is a structured learning experience that provides students with the opportunity to meet academic objectives through provision of community service. This semester we will work with the American Red Cross to develop and implement a blood drive to meet the needs of the organization and community. Throughout the process you will develop marketing skills through promotional efforts for the blood drive. We will reflect in class on the value of the experience from a community and interpersonal perspective.

The blood drive will be held on **Wednesday, November 16 in Insalaco Hall from 9:00 am-4:00 pm**. When schedules allow, students will be tasked with helping the American Red Cross before, during and after the blood drive. Students will work in teams to market the blood drive through various modes of communication (social networking, peer to peer and presentations to student groups). The American Red Cross will visit class to review details of the blood drive.

## EACH TEAM WILL BE REQUIRED TO COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:

1. Teams must visit at least two classes on campus to promote the blood drive. It is the responsibility of the team to contact a professor and ask permission to speak to the class for no more than 5 minutes. Documentation of visits must be submitted. Presentations should be completed no later than the week of **10/24**. This will allow for registration of blood donors during the weeks of **10/31 and 11/7**.
2. At least two sessions of registration will take place in Banks Student Center during the weeks of **10/31 and 11/7**. Teams will be required to attend at least one session to help with registration efforts. Dates and times to be determined.
3. Promotion of blood drive through various forms of social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, student newspaper, etc.).
4. Acquisition of one incentive to be given away at the blood drive.
5. All students will be required to register for service hours during the day of the blood drive.

## STUDENT RESOURCES

- There are a number of resources available for students on the service-learning pages of the portal. Consider adding **'Working with the Community: Student Service-Learning Guide'**, available to download from the portal, to the suggested readings.
- Provide **contact details** for the Office of Service-Learning as a resource for students.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS

- **Students should not be given a grade for the service hours performed.** They are given a grade based on the learning that happens because of the service and therefore, the manifestation of that knowledge. In other words, the reflection assignments are the evaluative measure of a service-learning experience. You do not grade the service, you grade the learning.
- **Reflection assignments should be structured.** When reflection is guided by the instructor, students connect their service work to course content more easily. Clearly define the methods of reflection and remember to use multiple reflective methods, respecting different student learning styles. Consider leading course discussions, creating journal prompts, paper topics, supplemental reading assignments and other methods that ask students to directly relate their service with course content.
- As with any academic assignment, **remember to include the logistics.** Include a list of due dates, formatting, and length requirements for each reflection assignment.

- **Determine the worth and weight of reflection assignments.** Tell students what percentage of their final grade will be represented by reflection assignments and the service-learning project. Students typically make judgments about the value of an assignment based on its contribution to their final grade.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Discuss how the selected partners **fit with course content**.
- Set a **due date** as to when the community partnerships must be formed and students must start working in the community.
- Provide information on any requirements for working with the community partner, such as **clearances, liability waivers, or other stipulations**. Direct students to the service-learning resources available on the portal or to the Office of Service-Learning for assistance.
- Whether there is one community partner organization or several, include **contact, scheduling or location information** you discussed with the organization.

### If students are required to create their own partnership(s):

- **Ideally, faculty form partnerships and present those partnerships to students;** however, if the task of students negotiating their own partnerships is **justified by the learning objectives** of the course, then clearly explain that to students.
- Guide students with statements regarding **the type of community organization** that will meet the learning objectives of your course. Students will need to inform the Office of Service-Learning of their selected partnership early on in the semester for review for conflicts and assistance in making the connection.
- **Include instructions** as to how to locate a community partner organization. Encourage students to utilize the Office of Service-Learning as a resource.

Adapted from ‘Constructing a Service-Learning Syllabus’ (Gail Jessen, Salt Lake Community College & Sean Brumfield, Chattahoochee Technical College)